

SUSQUEHANNA RIVER BASIN COMMISSION
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**SRBC CALLS ON CONGRESS TO RESTORE FUNDING FOR
SUSQUEHANNA FLOOD FORECAST AND WARNING SYSTEM**
Warning System Is Effective but Aging, Upgrades Are Critical

HARRISBURG, Pa. – The Susquehanna River Basin Commission (SRBC) this week approved a resolution (No. 2005-02) calling on the U.S. Congress to restore funding for the Susquehanna Flood Forecast and Warning System (Susquehanna System). SRBC is supporting a \$2 million appropriation request for federal fiscal year 2006 (FY-06). These funds, if restored, would be allocated to the National Weather Service (NWS) and the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to maintain and operate the Susquehanna System.

Historically, the federal budget included funding specifically for the Susquehanna System. Direct funding was eliminated two years ago by Congress, and SRBC and others are urging Congress to restore it for FY-06, which begins on October 1, 2005. For the past two fiscal years – FY-04 and 05 – the Susquehanna System has operated on a minimal budget using funds provided by the NWS from other programs. SRBC's request has broad support from Susquehanna basin congressmen, who are likewise calling on the full Congress to restore direct funding for the Susquehanna System.

SRBC – represented by the federal government and the states of New York, Pennsylvania and Maryland – cites the risks if adequate funding is not restored for the Susquehanna System in the FY-06 budget. The SRBC resolution states, “reduced funding would force discontinuance of stream gages and delay the maintenance of other important system infrastructure, thereby reducing the system's ability to provide timely and accurate flood forecasts, and contributing to the likelihood of increased loss of life, injury and flood damage.”

The Susquehanna River Basin is one of the most flood-prone watersheds in the country. More than 80 percent of the 1,400 plus municipalities in the Susquehanna basin include areas that are flood-prone. Since 1986, the Susquehanna System, with its technological system that uses radar and a network of stream and rain gages, has provided data used by the NWS to issue accurate and timely flood watches and warnings. The Susquehanna System is extremely cost-effective, with a benefit-cost ratio of 20-to-1, thus reducing average annual flood damages by \$32 million. For every federal dollar invested in the Susquehanna System, \$20 is saved through reduced damages and reduced federal flood recovery payouts.

“The Susquehanna System remains highly effective, but it is an aging system and in need of maintenance and upgrades to ensure its continued performance during floods,” said SRBC Executive Director Paul Swartz. “The need for upgrades is becoming more and more critical with each passing year, and without the \$2 million funding, the NWS and USGS will not be able make these necessary upgrades.”

Swartz said, “The Susquehanna System's stream gages must have new equipment installed before the current ones become obsolete, and the rain gages are beginning to wear out and need to be replaced.

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The shoe-string budget we've been working with for the past two fiscal years simply does not allow for these upgrades to be made."

With early flood warnings, businesses and residents living in flood-prone areas have time to secure their property and get themselves to safer locations before flood waters strike. Community and emergency management officials rely on the Susquehanna System to make good flood preparedness decisions, including notifying their residents of expected flooding and what actions they should take to protect themselves, and whether emergency officials need to implement evacuation procedures.

The SRBC resolution calls for a direct \$2 million line-item appropriation to be restored for FY-06, which would include \$1.5 million for technological operations and maintenance, and \$500,000 for the needed system upgrades.

The Susquehanna River Basin Commission is the governing agency established under a 100-year compact signed on Dec. 24, 1970 by the federal government and the states of New York, Pennsylvania and Maryland to protect and wisely manage the water resources of the Susquehanna River Basin. The Susquehanna River starts in Cooperstown, N.Y., and flows 444 miles to Havre de Grace, Md., where the river meets the Chesapeake Bay.

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